

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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INFORMATION REPORT

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SOURCE:

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Attitude Toward Soviet Films and Propaganda Films in General

1. Source stated that Soviet films with contemporary plots were very unpopular. The average film depicting contemporary life in the Soviet Union or elsewhere was usually too full of propaganda to be popular. She said that it often happened that such films would play to fairly full houses for the first day or two, when people were curious to see any film which was new, but that thereafter attendance would fall off sharply. It was not uncommon for the central office of the State Enterprise for Cinematography to receive reports showing that as few as 50 to 60 people were attending showings of films in a theater with a seating capacity of 500 persons. Source remembered one full-length documentary on Soviet life which was allowed to run for two weeks even though there were as few as 20 to 30 persons at some showings.
2. On the other hand, Soviet films on historical themes or films adapted from well-known literary classics were often very popular. Source said, for example, that the motion picture version of Tolstoi's story "The Living Corpse" played to almost full houses. Source had the impression that during the last six months or year there has been a trend toward the showing of more such popular Soviet films with only a minimum of propaganda, and away from the showing of the pure propaganda films. She thought the reason for this was that the Soviet motion picture makers preferred to stick to safe non-political subjects rather than to make more vulnerable films on contemporary subjects. She did not think that the change represented any policy decision to reduce the amount of propaganda in films.

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3. Source said that the central motion picture administration authorities in Sofia decided which film would be shown, and for how long. The managers of local cinemas made their reports on attendance to the central office. The latter would sometimes decide that an unpopular film would be withdrawn after only a very short run. It would also sometimes decide to extend the showing of a popular film. The desire to retain as large an audience as possible thus played a part in the presentation of films, but by no means the major part. Advertising efforts were devoted almost entirely to the films containing the maximum of propaganda. The popular non-political films with little or no political message were never given any publicity beyond the usual small listing in the newspapers, while propaganda films might be advertised by posters, on the radio, and by extensive articles in the press. Source did not think that the Bulgarian motion picture industry paid its own way. Since attendance was so poor for many of the films and since the bureaucratic overhead of the industry was so large, source thought that the industry probably had to be supported by subsidies.
4. In addition to the Soviet films, there were occasional showings of films made in Bulgaria, in the other Satellite countries, and in the West. The public reception of Bulgarian and other Satellite films was the same as for Soviet films, i.e. treatment of contemporary life was unpopular, and treatment of historical and literary subjects, usually very popular. Thus, a recent Bulgarian film based on the classic Bulgarian novel, "Under the Yoke" by Ivan Vazov, a book familiar to every Bulgarian from childhood, was extremely popular and was widely shown. Source had to buy a ticket more than a week in advance to see this film.
5. Western films were not shown in Bulgaria until they had already played in the U.S.S.R. This may not have been a rule, but source did not know of any exception to it. The number of such films was so small that they usually played to full houses even if, as sometimes happened, the audiences were disappointed in the films. This was the case with the Italian film "The Bicycle Thief," which source said disappointed its audience's expectations.

Status of Women in Bulgaria

6. Source said that Bulgarian women had the same rights and duties as Bulgarian men. Women were paid the same wages as men for the same work. In the legal code, the position of women was quite satisfactory. In practice, however, women were exploited and victimized by the regime to the same degree as every other part of the population. Many more women were working than in the past, but this was because they had to work to help support themselves and their families. Everyone had been so impoverished, that all had to work to keep alive.
7. The only effect of the regime's "emancipation" of women has been to make it possible, and necessary, for increasingly large numbers of women to compete with men in doing the heaviest kinds of work. Source was sure that the Communists had even fewer followers among the women of Bulgaria than among the men. She did not personally know anyone, or know by name of anyone, who is now in any of the Bulgarian prisons for women, but she knows that such prisons do exist.

Percentage of Fanatical Communists Among Young People

8. Source stated that only a very small minority of the young people in Bulgaria were Communists, but that it was impossible to say how many were fanatical Communists. [redacted] there were only two or three Communists in a group of 120 students. Source said she was unable to estimate how many young people were Communists at present. In [redacted] 25X1X [redacted] the State Enterprise for Cinematography there were six Party members out of twelve in the office, but this was an unusual percentage, and

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only a few of the persons in the office were young people.

Attitude of Bulgarian Youth Toward the United States

9. Source said she was unable to generalize about the attitude of Bulgarian youth toward the United States beyond saying that she was sure the youth thought well of the United States and hoped for much from the United States in the future. The United States was esteemed because, in contrast to other western countries which occasionally were soft on Communism, the United States was thought to be an out-and-out anti-Communist country.

Attitude of Students Toward Propaganda-Slanted Science

10. Source thought that the few science students she knew regarded the propaganda-slanted science favored by the Communists as something of a joke, but she was not interested in science and had never discussed the subject with anyone.

Popular Opinion as to Chervenkov's Successor

11. Source said she did not have the slightest idea as to who was considered next in line after Chervenkov. Before Poptomov died, everyone thought of him as next in line. No one had really expected Chervenkov to become the leader.

Information on Food Situation

12. Source said that, in general, food was usually more plentiful in Sofia than in the provinces. [redacted] in Bulgaria, for example, there was a sort of informal rationing of sugar whereby each person was allowed to buy only one-half kilogram every other week in Sofia. There was no official issuance of ration tickets for this sugar, but it was arranged that a person could buy sugar only at the grocery store where he was registered. The Fatherland Front representative at the store kept a record of sugar sales and did not allow more than half a kilogram per person every other week. Source said that during the same period people in the provinces were allowed much less than this. She knew of a family of two in the town of Ruse who received only one-half kilogram per month for the entire family. A friend of hers in Sofia used to send packages of sugar regularly to her parents who lived in Pleven. Less sugar was available at Pleven than in Sofia, even though there was a large sugar refinery at Dolna Mitropoliya only three or four kilometers from Pleven. Of course, there was no set practice in all of this; the supply of sugar varied according to locality and time of year.

13. Butter was also scarce, but there was no informal rationing system for it. If a person who was not in his own neighborhood saw a line of customers before a grocery store which happened to have butter in stock on sale, he or she could join the queue and receive one-fourth kilogram after an hour's wait. This was the maximum sold to any customer regardless of how many people there were in the family. Thus, the only way to get a fair amount of butter was to spend a lot of time and money shopping and queueing all over town. Very few could afford to do this since butter cost from five to six leva per pound.

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